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### ABSTRACT

Research into the effects of college on students reveals that there are 6 types of students enrolled in American colleges and universities today, 4 of which are discussed in the present document. The types discussed are: (1) the psychically foreclosed or students who come to college with a predetermined career or goal in mind who never expose themselves to alternative paths or differing opinions; (2) the situationally foreclosed, or students who have never been exposed to alternative modes of thinking and behaving and are characterized by lack of information and a minimal opportunity for experience; (3) the moratorium students, or those students whose ideas and ideals change constantly, but who, in time, will achieve direction and commitment; and (4) achieved identity status students, or those students who are both deeply self-involving and flexible, made with a readiness to bend, adapt, and even change with the inevitable personal changes that life, experience, and circumstances bring about. It is clear from this that no one curriculum could ever have a great effect on students in this diverse range. Rather, curricula should be adapted to individual needs and individual personalities. (HS)

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# EXAMINED AND UNEXAMINED LIVES

MILDRED HENRY with HARRIET RENAUD

One of the firmly held beliefs in academe is that a liberal education liberalizes and enriches. But does it accomplish this feat for everyone, and if not, then for whom?

There can be little question that the liberal arts colleges have emphasized that they mean to bring about significant changes in their students, as statements from their catalogues clearly indicate:

*The program . . . has the . . . goal of developing in each individual student his ultimate potential of human worth and dignity . . .*

*It is . . . a process designed to help a person understand himself, other human beings, and the society in which he finds himself . . .*

*The student should develop a genuine interest in things intellectual and artistic sufficient to motivate continuing self-education . . .*

Nevertheless, some 15 years ago, Jacob (1957) was able to shock the academic world by asserting that most young people in colleges evidently did little more than learn to adjust to the campus climate, so that by their senior year they had moved, politically and intellectually, toward the views held by most of their fellow students. And recently, Feldman and Newcomb's (1969) exhaustive review of the literature showed that it is still unclear whether the liberalized attitudes that manifest themselves in college—in political, social, and religious attitudes—are merely adaptive and perhaps transient mechanisms to conform to a campus norm, or evidence of a pervasive molding of inner disposition and character.

To explore whether colleges encourage students, for the most part, to a kind of standardized campus liberalism, or whether they enable them to consciously develop more actively held values, in the fall of 1966 the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education initiated a series of longitudinal studies on 1,580 students in five institutions, the results of which are being prepared for a final report. Those data are now being looked at in the context of the influence of faculty characteristics and campus environment on students of different attitudinal and personality dispositions. The following informal observations are based on interviews conducted to gather data for a phase of that report, and took place in generally small, experimental colleges, institutions which claim to strongly influence their students.

## IDENTITY STATES AS PHASES OF GROWTH

The students interviewed seemed to illustrate six identity or "self-states" which represent different phases of growth, four of which will be discussed here. The terms used here to designate the identity states are similar to those used by Erikson (1956, 1963) and Marcia (1966).

### *The "Psychically Foreclosed"*

Among students who come to college with a predetermined career or goal in mind (to become a lawyer; to get a credential; to find a husband), a good majority never consider any other path, and any question of alternative life styles rarely comes up for discussion. Awareness of options or the possibility of change tends to precipitate anxiety in such young people, and left to themselves they skirt the unfamiliar and place themselves in situations which do not offer choices. They thus effectively insulate themselves from meeting new people and being exposed to new ideas.

One of the implications of such a mode of operation for the college experience is that these students, already largely closed down to new experiences and ideas when they enter college, usually continue to avoid faculty whose views might challenge theirs, and choose peers who share their beliefs and values. All their encounters and experiences in college therefore tend to serve as reinforcement for the attitudes and opinions they brought with them.

It is common to find that the predetermined careers of these "psychically foreclosed" are viewed by them as being highly utilitarian, and were evidently hit upon without regard for their intrinsic interest, or for their value other than as a means toward a livelihood.

One student, who had never seriously considered going into any field but law, said,

*I decided on becoming a lawyer back in the eighth grade. I don't know how I decided on this really. But I am certain this is what I want to be. I don't feel I will dislike the law. . . . I feel it won't bore me to death and it pays adequately . . .*

An interest in Russian was given up when he decided, "It is not especially relevant to law," and when asked whether he knew what it might feel like to be a lawyer, and what was required of him, he said, "I have some phone numbers of people to call who could tell me something about it, but I haven't bothered to do this yet. Anyway, I don't expect not to like law."

Each year, this student's response to queries about his life plans varied little in content and manner. His attitudes toward law didn't change; his expressed satisfaction with the status quo never altered. To the question, "Can you think of and describe any experience that had a big influence on you prior to coming to college?", he answered, "Nothing stands out strongly. I was always oriented toward going to college." To the question, "Are there any important ways you would like to change in the future?", he answered "No." When any change is perceived as threat, even changes that come with normal growth and development are evidently precluded.

Not given to introspection, and out of touch with their own feelings, these kinds of foreclosed students accept "general opinion" as their value system, and handle difficult situations by conforming without conviction and adapting behaviorally without any internal restructuring of feelings and ideas. Asked what he found most challenging or difficult in college, the pre-law student said, "... since the faculty is less conservative than the students, you have to learn to express things in their terms, and that can be difficult."

To express things in his own terms or to try to define his own terms did not seem to have occurred as a possibility to this "psychically foreclosed" student. Nor is this possibility likely to arise for him unless he is helped, with a good deal of encouragement, to recognize the value of defining himself and the world in his own way.

The perception of differences in values and style is a universal human problem; what often distinguishes between people most critically is the way in which the differences are handled. The psychically foreclosed individuals, whose instinctive response is to regard any difference as a threat of conflict, and any conflict as intolerable, move to avoid it. This response is in marked contrast to that of the other types observed.

### *The "Situationally Foreclosed"*

Students designated here as "situationally foreclosed" also seem markedly limited in their affective lives when they come to college—but with a difference. They are for the most part young people who have never been exposed to alternative modes of thinking and behaving, and their constraints, rather than being the wounds of earlier psychic battles, are simply evidence of backgrounds characterized by lack of information and a minimal opportunity for experience.

When such students become aware of a whole new range of options and opportunities, their response can sometimes be dramatic. As old assumptions and realities are brought into question, a restructuring and reordering of attitudes and priorities begin to take place. Some, of course, left without the firm moorings of a familiar, usually parental value system, get caught in crisis situations which they are

unable to resolve. But those strong enough to make trials and risk errors, who are open to their inner experiences, and reflective about the probable consequences of unfamiliar ways of behaving and feeling, enter into the next phase of identity formation—the moratorium stage.

### *The Moratorium Students*

In the sense that it is used here, the term "moratorium" does not imply a suspension of activity, but rather a delay in making final commitments—to people, ideas, a lifestyle—during a period of experiential testing and exploration. Students in a moratorium stage of development characteristically engage in a good deal of introspection and analysis of motives—their own and others. Embarked on the adventurous task of reality-testing, they seek diverse friends and experiences, try out different modes of acting and thinking, and open everything to question. They tend to engage in a variety of apparently unrelated interests, but what seems like total involvement in Zen, or modern art, or a political movement, usually turns out to be a temporary port, simply another place to be assessed in the long itinerary of experience.

In college, these are the students who reach out to events and seize on alternatives in the academic environment. They are particularly sensitive and responsive to casual comments dropped in lectures, class discussions, and seminars, search out and read unassigned books, and find it important to talk with professors informally.

Unlike the foreclosed students, who seem wholly future-oriented, and in effect mortgaged to a prearranged future, students in a moratorium stage are engaged in a perpetual process of taking soundings on their experiences and reformulating goals. In time, their tentative, experimental pattern in relation to people and tasks is replaced by real commitment as they move toward an "achieved identity status."

### *Achieved Identity Status*

Unlike the unchanging, unconsciously determined commitments of foreclosed individuals, the commitments of those who have achieved identity are both deeply self-involving and flexible, made with a readiness to bend, adapt, and even change with the inevitable personal changes that life, experience, and circumstances bring about. Such people's growth clearly does not end with graduation from college.

A case in point is the student from a lower middle-class Lutheran family, who provides an enlightening contrast to the psychically foreclosed pre-law student described earlier. Both young men came to college expecting to become lawyers, and both graduated with the same intention. But the second student's comments revealed that during the four years in college both he and his conception of his career had shifted, changed, been reconstituted.

As a freshman, he wanted to become a lawyer because he thought this career offered an "opportunity for significant accomplishment." In his sophomore year, he made

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it clear that he was trying to discover which aspect of the law he wanted to go into, and what specifically he could accomplish through the law. During his junior year, he felt that a kind of law that made for social justice was important, and saw law as combining "reality with abstract ideas—a fusion of the two." He felt this suited his "style of thinking," and he was "90 percent certain" that he would go into law. At the end of his senior year, he regarded the law not as a closed-ended choice, but rather as "a stepping-stone for other things that I might want to go into" at a later time as his life unfolded. The law, for him, had come to have a substantive value in and of itself, and he was in the process of exploring the implications of this value for himself.

Nearing graduation, he stated, "I'm going to law school. Beyond that I haven't decided. I'm leaving it wide open." Thus, as his commitment to the law sharpened and became more articulated, it also became more flexible. Going into the law had become a possible means toward other ends, and not an end in itself; a doorway hopefully opening into still other areas of life, still in the process of being discovered.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

Do liberal arts colleges and programs significantly help students to change and develop in fundamental ways? Are students liberated from the unexamined bases for their thought and action which they have carried with them into college? Do they learn to lead examined lives as a result of their undergraduate experience?

If we are to move closer to a realization of the liberal arts vision—toward increasing the individual's ability to examine the assumptions that guide his thought and action—we must devise an educational process that engages students more directly. The current study indicated what other writers also have held—that currently only those students ready to grow and develop (and who do not get caught in a crisis bind) manage to develop further in the present undergraduate system of education. Since many of these seem to need only a diverse, ideationally rich environment to nudge them into growth, the process of relatively passive exposure offered by the current formal liberal arts curriculum at least does not get in their way.

It is ironical that, although the time in college has often been described as a moratorium period—when students can make mistakes, develop, grow, and find themselves before entering the adult world—it is mainly those already capable of experiencing, acting, and reflecting (those already in what we have defined here as a moratorium phase of self-development)—who make the college experience a true moratorium. For students who are foreclosed, mere exposure to a liberal arts curriculum and faculty does not seem to be enough. In colleges where more liberal views and practices were the norm, some foreclosed students became even more defensively foreclosed, and adjusted, for the most part, by coping with academic demands in a formalistic rather than an assimilative manner. They were permitted to play the



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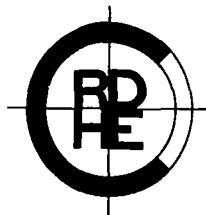
academic game without ever being forced to become involved to the point of recognizing and re-examining the assumptions by which they guided their lives.

Three suggestions might be offered to colleges seeking to make a difference in the lives of their students:

1. Students should be given more direct help and practice in learning how to think more critically and constructively about their lives. Most students listed extracurricular experiences and peers as their main sources for self-discovery and growth, and this suggests that the sources commonly presumed to have an impact on students—the faculty and the curricular structure—are not critically influential in the kind of growth students need most at this point in their lives. Asked about focal points of discussion between them and faculty members, few mentioned items such as, *Made me aware of social issues*, *Encouraged me to inspect my values*, or *Counseled me about career plans*. Caught in the narrow shafts of the academic disciplines in college, students more frequently named former high school teachers than college faculty as having stimulated them to think.

It is unrealistic to expect students at the outset to move from the unexamined values by which they govern their actions, or to be vitally interested in the substantive problems of an academic discipline which are not of immediate concern to them. They are involved, or ought to be involved, in the task of building a self. This is undoubtedly one of the most important tasks they will ever have to do, and it is critically important for them and for society that they do it well.

2. If students are to strive for the growth and development they are potentially capable of during their college years, then they must be given more emotional support and encouragement than they typically get from faculty or support service people such as student personnel counselors. It is customary for the faculty to ignore the affective dimension of students and only pay attention to the cognitive, and for support service people to wait for students to come to them for help and advice. At least one-third of the students in our sample could have used help from people skilled in helping to clarify emotions.



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Perhaps the most important change that needs to be made in undergraduate education is to provide an educational process for individuals who are developing, growing human beings. Accordingly, both the cognitive and affective or emotional dimensions of students must be given comparable attention. Students must be involved in critical, reflective thinking, experiencing, and acting. Without a wide range of opportunities for involvement and experimentation in these areas, they will be unable to put together a picture which includes themselves, others, and the larger world.

3. Students should be responded to as particular kinds of holistic individuals. Teaching approaches and curricular tasks need to be different for the psychically foreclosed, the situationally foreclosed, those in moratorium, and those with achieved identities. *The psychically foreclosed* need to be taught that their feelings, emotions, and desires are valuable and valid, that the abstractions governing their lives are not ones they actively and consciously chose. *The situationally foreclosed* need to be exposed to a variety of options and encouraged to explore the implications of diversity. And when the presumably stable worlds of both the psychically and situationally foreclosed start to crumble, they need encouragement to actively enter into finding, experimenting with, and critically thinking about new ways of being in the world. For the *students in a moratorium*, who are already actively thinking, exploring, and experiencing, the program provided should be diverse and allow for trial and failure without punishing failure per se. They need help in learning how to critically assess and reassess their efforts so that eventually they can learn how to make thoughtful choices and focus their energy on commitments to longer-lasting, more demanding tasks. Those who have reached an *achieved status* of identity formation need only to be allowed to pursue whatever commitments they have selected.

Failure to recognize that students are in different developmental phases when they enter college has been a factor in the failure of colleges to successfully change students in the direction of leading more examined lives.

When the affective dimension is neglected, students are left to sink or swim on their own. As indicated by the

data, the results of their being left solely on their own are not heartening. Many sink. Many others barely stay afloat, clinging to the bits and pieces of former lives. Some learn how to swim. A very few learn how to swim against the current.

The results of research on the importance of colleges on students has not been encouraging, but a realistic assessment of the situation indicates that very few colleges have given serious attention to providing educational experiences that are specifically designed to touch their students' affective lives. The solutions are not easy. Further experimentation and further evaluation are needed to turn the rhetoric of the catalogues into the realities of the campus.

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